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ABSTRACT

Elementary and secondary teachers can nurture creativity in the classroom through the selection and development of curriculum content and through interpersonal dialogue between teacher and student. The celebration of the Bicentennial provides an opportunity for the incorporation of related resources such as films, recordings, readings, prose and poetry. Learning experiences should be selected on the basis of student interest and motivation, adequacy of background information, and degree to which the experience provides an opportunity for original feeling and thought. Teacher response and approval is crucial to the success of written and oral activities suggested. (KS)

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FOSTERING CREATIVITY THROUGH CHILDREN'S WRITTEN AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS RELATED TO THE CELEBRATION OF THE BICENTENNIAL

Creativity can be fostered in the classrooms across our nation through the development of written and oral expressions related to the celebration of the Bicentennial Year. This is true whether one is teaching at the pre-school, intermediate, middle school, or secondary level.

Definitions of creativity many of which are found throughout the literature concerning the education of our children and youth, reflect varying schools of psychological thought. Erich Fromm, for example, states "Creativity is the ability to see (or be aware) and to respond."[1] Rollo May describes creativity as the encounter of the intensely conscious human being with his world.[2] Carl Rogers writes of the creative process as the emergence in action of a novel relational product growing out of the uniqueness of the individual and the materials, events, people or circumstances of his life.[3] E. Paul Torrance, an

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[1]Erich Fromm, "The Creative Attitude," in Creativity and Its Cultivation, ed. Harold H. Anderson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959) p.44.

[2]Rollo May, "The Nature of Creativity," in Creativity and Its Cultivation, p.68

[3]Carl Rogers, "Toward a Theory of Creativity," Creativity and Its Cultivation, p.71.

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educational psychologist, defines the creative process somewhat more narrowly in terms of sensing problems or gaps in information, the forming of ideas or hypotheses, the testing or modification of these ideas and the communication of results. He believes, however, that this process may lead to any one of many kinds of products: verbal and non-verbal, concrete and abstract.[4]

Several commonalities emerge as one reviews the sampling of definitions given above: (1) creativity involves a response between the person and his environment, (2) the response is unique to the individual responding and (3) the resulting product may be as diverse as an object, an idea, or a course of action.

It is the author's belief that each person is endowed at birth with some degree of potential creativity. That is to say, each person has the potential to make a unique response in thought and feeling to the materials available to him in his environment. Further, it is the writer's premise that the teacher can and does nurture creativity in the classroom (1) through the development of a physical environment conducive to creative response, (2) through the selection and development of curriculum content and related learning opportunities and (d) through interpersonal dialogue between the teacher and student. These three areas are both interrelated and interdependent. However, this discussion of oral and written expression related to the celebration of the Bicentennial Year focuses primarily upon the selection and development of integrated language learning experiences, designed to nurture the creative response of the learner.

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[4]E. Paul Torrance, "Creativity: An Extension of the Learning Parameters," in the The Student and the Learning Environment, ed. Susan S. Miehofer (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1974), p.46.

Selection and Development of Learning Experiences

The initial selection of learning experiences is critical if the teacher is to nurture creativity in the classroom. Guidelines, which a teacher might consider in making curricular decisions linked to the selection and subsequent development of language learning experiences related to the celebration of the Bicentennial Year, may be stated in terms of the following questions:

1. Does the experience appear to motivate and interest the student?
2. Does the student have sufficient background information available to allow him to create?
3. Does the experience provide the student an opportunity to respond with feeling and original thought?
4. Does the experience provide a broad base from which a rich variety of creative response becomes possible?

Each of the basic criteria listed above will be discussed briefly.

The motivation and interest of the student are essential considerations in the design of all educative opportunities made available to the learner. "Knowing" the individual student is crucial. As you, the teacher encourage, invite, and guide the student to become involved in original oral and written expressions there can be no substitute for the clues you garner about a student's individual interests, concerns, learning abilities and learning style.

It is important to note that learning experiences are best planned both for and with the learner. With respect to this notion, Miel points

out that while the teacher needs to deal creatively with topics introduced by the learner, the teacher has the further responsibility to make content available that might not otherwise come into the experience of the individual in a specific educational setting.[5] In the initial selection of learning experiences one does consider the student's interests and concerns but also helps him to move beyond his stated or implied interest.

The second criterion concerning background information available to the student is particularly significant as one seeks to develop original oral and written expression linked to historical data about the founding of our country. Students cannot write or speak expressing their original thought and feeling without a prior experiential base that provides needed information about the historical period. Fortunately, such a background of understanding and sensitivity to the milieu of the Revolutionary Period can be made available to students through the use of films, film strips, recordings and readings.

Commercial production of various multi-media materials related to the celebration of the Bicentennial Year provide a bank of rich resources for teachers and students. Further, annotated bibliographies of prose and poetry related to the founding of these United States abound.[6] But again; it is the perceptive teacher who makes the discriminating choice of background material to be made available to students. Careful selection and development of informational background materials can indeed stimulate

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[5]Alice Miel, editor, Creativity in Teaching Invitation and Instances, (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc. 1961) p.74.

[6]See for example, "Bicentennial Multi-media Materials, A Listing from Publishers and Producers," Instructor LXXXIV:8 (April 1975) pp. 103-114; Bicentennial Reading, Viewing, Listening; American Library Association, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611; "A Bicentennial Bigliography," Wilson Library Bulletin, March 1975 pp.504-511

the creative flow of thought and feeling needed in the development of original expressions in writing and speaking. Not all available materials are of equal value in this important step of providing necessary prior informational input for students. This notion is detailed in the following discussion of criterion number three.

Our third criterion for the selection and eventual development of learning experiences related to written and oral expressions celebrating the Bicentennial Year highlights the need to present students with learning opportunities that will foster response both with feeling and with original thought. However, to respond with feeling and with thought one must become involved with situations presenting the human condition, emphasizing the human element, the human values inherent in the struggle for independence and the birth of our nation. For example, in facing such questions as, "What was it like to have a father fighting with the British and a brother in the Colonial Army?" "You are a Colonial woman living in Philadelphia at the time of the Revolution. You overhear two British officers speaking of plans for attacking Colonial forces. What would you do?" students are freed then to move beyond rote "learning about" our American heritage to the composing of their own insights into historical events subsequently expressing them creatively in written and oral expresssions.

As one considers the fourth criterion for the selection and development of creative learning experiences, namely the need of a broad base from which a rich variety of creative response becomes possible, one is reminded again that learning experiences which elicit a personally meaningful creative response in thought and feeling for one student may not do so

for another. Diverse factors such as the student's own past experiences, his personal emotional disposition, the "happenings" within his life's space that day may have a significant bearing on his responses.

However, a broad informational base can be helpful. Why not have a variety of print and non-print materials available to serve as background resources for students? Original sources such as letters, autobiographies and historical documents can often set the stage for a truly creative response. Try introducing the music, legends, and poetry of the Revolutionary War Period as "starters" to creative response.

Student choice in mode of response is also critical here. For example, participation in a debate concerning the issues involved in precipitating the Revolutionary War may appeal to some students. Others, however, may respond more creatively to organizing and reporting on an action research project pertaining to the founding of the town or city they live in. Still others may be interested in researching contrasting modes of communication in use today and those in use two hundred years ago. Graphic representation accompanied by oral discussion might well be meaningful for some students with respect to such an assignment. Thus by providing for a broad informational base together with student choice of mode of response, the teacher can more nearly anticipate a rich variety of creative written and oral expressions.

Illustrative Written and Oral Expressions

In the following section of this paper specific illustrative learning experiences which have the potential to elicit original response in thought and feeling are presented. Examples of learning experiences designed to

involve students in creative written expressions related to the Bicentennial Year include the following:

1. Write a newspaper item as it might have been published before, during or after the Revolutionary War.
2. Write a letter to your family in England. You are living in Boston at the time of the American Revolution.
3. Make daily entries into your personal journal or diary for any given week in 1775-1776. You are living in New York/Philadelphia/Boston/along the Hudson River/ two hundred years ago.
4. Write a mystery story about a spy involved in the Revolutionary War.
5. Write the words of a song that might have been sung at the first Fourth of July.

Illustrative oral activities calling for original and creative responses include:

1. Draw a cartoon about the Revolutionary War Period. Tell your class about it.
2. Tape record an imaginary conversation between a store-keeper and a customer living in New York during the Revolution.
3. Assume the role of a famous person living during the Revolutionary War Period. Share with your class an original "Who Am I?" riddle about the person.

4. Select a poem about the Revolutionary War Period. Use it in a choral reading planned and carried out with three or more fellow students.

5. Make a mobile depicting characters and events of the Revolutionary War Period. Tell why you include each item.

Each of the learning experiences listed above can be adapted to differing developmental and age levels and to differing entry skill levels related to writing and speaking. For example, in item number 4 listed under written expression (Write a mystery story) less experienced writers might write an original ending to a story you have shared with them rather then attempting to write a complete story of their own. Item 1 (Write a newspaper item) might be adapted for less mature students by providing short newspaper items from a current publication which the student in turn would convert to an item appropriate for a newspaper of the Revolutionary Period. Each of the above adaptations could also be used as interim learning experiences leading eventually to more nearly unique creative expressions.

Teacher Response to Creative Expression

In conclusion, teacher response to students' creative efforts is a critical factor in the nurture of creativity. Zirbes refers to creative teaching as sensitive insightful developmental guidance.[7] For this writer, such guidance includes teacher response to creative products. As you, the teacher, encourage the student-creator in his original oral and

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[7]Laura Zirbes, Spurs to Creative Teaching, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959) p.36.

written expressions related to the celebration of the Bicentennial Year try to establish an ongoing teacher-student dialogue focused on individual progress and achievement. You will then, even through the evaluative process, continue to encourage the student to create.

As we celebrate the nation's Bicentennial Year teachers have both the responsibility and the opportunity to provide for students learning experiences related to the celebration that will enhance and release the creative potential of the individual learner. The guidelines discussed here concerning motivation, informational background, the human element, and the need for student choice are critical ingredients in teaching that can indeed promote significant student growth in creative writing and speaking.